

Media, PA -- On Tuesday, February 27th, Congressman Joe Sestak (D-PA) held a mental health parity forum in his congressional district to highlight the need for health insurers to cover mental illness at the same level as they cover physical illness.

“The issue of mental health parity is an extremely important one and that’s why I am pleased to have Congressman Kennedy and so many of my constituents and local health experts here today at this forum,” noted Joe. “Mental illness is the leading disability in America – an estimated 26.4 percent of Americans aged 18 and older—about one in four adults—suffer from diagnosable mental illness. Yet, our current health care system is not one that effectively promotes recovery from mental illness. That’s why I strongly favor Kennedy’s bipartisan legislation that will ensure that health plans offer fair coverage for mental health care. The bill simply makes sense both economically and morally.”

Added Congressman Kennedy: “If it's one thing that conducting field hearings around the country really drives home, it's that mental illnesses and addictions don't discriminate on the basis of geography or class or race. With Congressman Sestak's help, I am confident we are going to finally make sure that health insurance doesn't discriminate either, and pass the Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act this year.”

Joining Joe at the event were mental health experts and Congressman Patrick Kennedy (D-RI), a principal author of bipartisan legislation to close the loopholes that allow plans to charge higher co-payments, coinsurance, deductibles, and maximum out-of-pocket limits and impose lower day and visit limits on mental health and addiction care.

According to the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania:

- Treatment success rates for mental disorders compare favorably with success rates for other medical treatments. Treatment success rates for major depression range from 65% to 80%; for manic-depression, 80%; for panic disorder, 80% for schizophrenia, 60%. By contrast the common cardiovascular treatment of angioplasty has a 41% success rate.

The costs to society of untreated mental illness are greater than the costs of providing treatment. We currently spend three times as much on the indirect costs of mental illness as on treatment.

- Equal coverage of mental illnesses with physical illnesses would be expected to yield a net savings to the nation of \$2.2 billion.
- Depression costs businesses \$24 billion annually through lost income.
- Treatment for mental illnesses results in substantially lower use of “medical” benefits.

The bipartisan legislation, the Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act, expands the Mental Health Parity Act of 1996 by requiring group health plans that offer benefits for mental health and addiction to do so on the same terms as care for other diseases. The legislation closes the loopholes that allow plans to charge high copayments, coinsurance, deductibles, and maximum out-of-pocket limits and impose lower day and visit limits on mental health addiction care.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever to serve in the U.S. Congress.

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